providing a sealing device comprising a tube having a proximal end and a distal end, an inner bore and an outer surface, said proximal end having a larger outer diameter than said distal end, and an inflatable membrane disposed within said inner bore;

making an incision in the body;

inserting said distal end of said sealing device through said incision;

advancing said sealing device through said incision to form a seal between said incision and said outer surface of said outer bore; and

inflating said inflatable membrane.

9. A method of sealing a skin incision for performing a minimally invasive surgical procedure at a surgical site in a body, said method comprising:

providing a sealing device comprising a tube having a proximal end and a distal end, an inner bore and an outer surface, said proximal end having a larger outer diameter than said distal end, an inflatable membrane disposed within said inner bore, said inflatable membrane being adapted to completely fill said inner bore when inflated and to leave an open lumen through said inner bore when deflated, and a plurality of protrusions extending from said outer surface of said tube;

making an incision in the body;

inserting said distal end of said sealing device through said incision;

advancing said sealing device through said incision to form a seal between said incision and said outer surface of said outer bore; and

inflating said inflatable membrane.

15. (New) A method of sealing a skin incision for performing a surgical procedure at a surgical site in a body, said method comprising:

providing a sealing device comprising a tube having a proximal end and a distal end, an inner bore and an outer surface, said proximal end having a larger outer diameter than said distal end, and an inflatable membrane sealingly disposed within said inner bore, the inflatable member being in an inflated state;

making an incision in the body;

inserting said distal end of said sealing device through the incision;

advancing said sealing device through said incision to form a seal between the incision and said outer surface of said outer bore;

deflating the inflatable member sufficiently to allow passage of a surgical tool through said inner bore of the sealing device while substantially maintaining a seal between said inflatable membrane and said surgical tool; and

performing a surgical procedure through the incision with said surgical tool.

A. REMARKS

In an Office Action dated October 14, 1999, the Examiner rejected claims 1-14 of the instant application under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a), first paragraph. Specifically, the Examiner alleged that claim 1 was unpatentable over U.S. Pat. 5,071,411 to Hillstead. Further, claims 2-14 were rejected by the Examiner as being unpatentable over Hillstead in view of U.S. Pat. 5,273,545 to Hunt. According to the Examiner, "Hillstead teaches all applicants' structural limitations, therefore it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art to use the device of Hillstead to perform the method of applicant."